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ABSTRACT

This brochure provides an overview of programs and services of the components of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. First it describes services of the Office of Special Education Programs in implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, especially the Parent Training and Information Centers, and the Office's assistance to the states in developing early identification and professional development programs. Next, it looks at activities of the Rehabilitation Services Administration to support state vocational rehabilitation programs, independent living centers, and programs to train and place people with disabilities in jobs. Finally, research and technology activities of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research and the Office of Special Education Programs are noted, such as development of an idea book for adaptive parenting equipment, work to improve computer accessibility, and research on the use of technology in education. Case studies illustrate how individuals have been positively affected by these government programs. (DB)

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Office of Special Education

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to Inclusion,

From Dependence

to Independence.

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Education

In the United States, a good education and continuous lifelong learning are keys to turning your hopes and dreams into real-life achievements. That's true for everyone, non-disabled people and people with disabilities alike.

The United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), through its Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), helps states carry out their responsibility to provide to all students with disabilities a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. These responsibilities are spelled out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

With IDEA, over 1 million students with disabilities, many of whom would have attended separate schools or lived in large, expensive institutions 25 years ago, are living at home and attending schools in their community.

Students with disabilities are completing high school at higher rates each year and are becoming productive citizens. The employment rate among youth served by IDEA is twice that of people with disabilities who went to school before IDEA took effect.

Encouraging parental involvement

Parental involvement is vital to nurturing student achievement. IDEA empowers parents of students with disabilities to be participants in decision making about their children. But for this participation to be effective, parents need to know their rights and they need to be knowledgeable about programs and services.

Through Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) in every state, OSERS helps parents of disabled students assist their children in succeeding in school. Through the centers, parents receive the training and information they need to effectively exercise their rights and responsibilities under IDEA. PTIs help create effective partnerships among parents and between parents and educators.

Serving youth from birth through age 21

All students can learn if taught in ways that meet their needs. The earlier students receive the services they need to become effective learners, the better their chances of success. That's why OSEP supports "early identification" programs to help schools and families pinpoint disabilities that could affect a child's learning and development. OSERS-supported programs help states develop and acquire services and technological tools that help students with disabilities and young people from birth through age 21.

OSERS also helps states provide professional development opportunities to teachers whose primary service is in special education and to those who work with children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Furthermore, OSERS-supported programs help states gather and disseminate information about meeting the needs of students with disabilities and their families.

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Mattingly Eisner is a third-grade student. He was born with Down syndrome and multiple heart problems. Because of IDEA, Matty and his family have been able to obtain the differing educational services needed during each phase of his young life. Shortly after he was born, Matty's family and a team of professionals from various departments of the local school district developed an Individualized Family Service Plan designed to meet his particular needs.

From the time he was a newborn to 1 1/2 years old, Matty and his family received services at home designed to stimulate his language development, sharpen his senses, and increase his learning skills. And when he had a series of open-heart operations, the early education specialists were there to help support him and his family.

Later, Matty and his mother attended preschool so he could interact with other children and his mother could learn the best ways to play with him. At age 6, in kindergarten, Matty was placed in a regular classroom with a teacher's aide to assist him.

From the time he began learning in an inclusive setting, Matty's ability to verbalize has increased dramatically and he has become an avid reader. Matty's teachers say he loves to learn and enjoys being pushed to learn new things.

Matty's classmates get impatient for their turn to study with him. Having Matty as a pal helps them learn important lessons about getting along with other people.

Before the passage of IDEA, children such as Matty Eisner might have been shut off from the rest of society, their potential ignored. But today, Matty is full of the anticipation and excitement that is the right of all 9-year olds. He is formulating his life's dreams and expects to reach them.

Matty gives his Mom a hug.

Employment

One of the primary objectives of all the education and training programs supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) is to ensure that people with disabilities gain employment consistent with their individual abilities, strengths, and interests so that they can become independent and self-sufficient.

OSERS' Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) supports state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs that give people with disabilities the education, job-training, and job-placement services they need to become contributing members of society.

RSA also supports nearly 250 independent living centers across the nation and a myriad of other programs that help people with disabilities become better integrated into their communities.

Three-fourths of the people who use state VR services are significantly disabled. For them, RSA-supported programs are indispensable to becoming employed.

Serving people with disabilities one by one.

Each state Vocational Rehabilitation Agency is unique, but the heart and soul of all public VR systems are programs that match each disabled person's strengths, interests and aspirations to jobs that could utilize them.

Serving our nation.

VR programs help reduce individuals with disabilities' reliance on public funds. In fact, more than 80 percent of the individuals rehabilitated through VR are engaged in competitive employment.

VR officials in every state work closely with local business communities and potential employers to bring down barriers to the employment of people with disabilities and to make sure that job-training programs meet the needs of today's job market.

Since they were established by the Smith-Fess Act 75 years ago, state VR programs have helped some 9 million people acquire employment. These programs have been continually reauthorized and expanded with bipartisan congressional support.

At present, the VR system serves more than 1 million people each year. More than 200,000 of them annually enter or return to the competitive labor market or become self-employed. Since 1992, the number of significantly disabled people who were rehabilitated has increased by approximately 16 percent.

Fred Jones is an elementary school guidance counselor.
He conducts classes to help children cope with day-to-day problems, counsels individual youngsters when they need to talk with someone, and meets with students' families to resolve difficult situations. His rapport with students has won awards.

Blind from birth, Fred uses a cane for independent mobility. Cassie, his Seeing Eye Dog, accompanies him almost everywhere.

Fred earned his bachelor's degree with financial assistance from a state rehabilitation services agency. Then, on his own, he financed the studies that led to his M.A. in guidance and counseling.

He applied for jobs in nearby school districts but received no offers.

Fred did not give up. Instead, he became better prepared for employment by completing a state Rehabilitation Center program that taught him to use equipment designed to help blind educators keep records, produce correspondence, and write lesson plans.

He landed a job but did not stop training. He spent his vacation back at the Rehabilitation Center learning how to use equipment that the Division of Rehabilitation Services had provided—a computer with speech, a scanner and both text and Braille printers.

Without the help he received from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Fred's students might never have had the opportunity to benefit from his wisdom, concern, and gentle but firm advice.

Research and Technology

Nurturing independence

Supporting research into exactly how disabilities affect individuals is the mission of two components of OSERS: the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). They are contributing to a better understanding of how to enable individuals with disabilities of all ages to be as self-sufficient as possible. Under the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act, NIDRR supports 56 states and territories in their efforts to conduct research and disseminate technology and information aimed at freeing the insights, wisdom, and skills of persons with disabilities through the use of computers, voice enhancers, wheel chairs, and other technological devices.

For example, the Adaptive Parenting Equipment: Idea Book 1 was developed with support from NIDRR at **Through the Looking Glass,** a Rehabilitation and Training Center in Berkeley, California. The publication describes equipment such as lifting harnesses and baby-bathing carts that can help disabled mothers and fathers of small children practice successful parenting.

And most of the built-in features that allow individuals with disabilities to use the Microsoft corporation's Window's 95 computer program were the result of work supported by NIDRR at the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Adaptive Computers and Information Systems at the University of Wisconsin's Trace Center.

Furthermore, NIDRR coordinates technical assistance, training and materials development projects that help businesses, local governments, and others comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Breaking down barriers to learning

OSERS' Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) aids efforts to develop and acquire technological tools that help students with disabilities learn. OSEP, through the Technology, Educational Media and Materials Program established under IDEA, has pioneered CD-roms, virtual reality helmets, interactive videos, telecommunication systems, captioning, and audio-description devices that can open information pathways for disabled students.

For thirty years, OSERS has also supported pioneering efforts to develop teaching techniques to help students with cognitive disabilities achieve to high standards. For example, OSEP research has led to the increased use of students as teachers in special education settings. OSEP has also contributed to the development of teaching methods aimed at helping students with cognitive disabilities better organize and focus on their studies.

Ursula with her job coach Katie Ingalls.

Ursula Battle is a data entry clerk. Thanks to a device she uses that was made available with support from OSERS, she is helping to keep our nation a world leader.

Ursula is employed by Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc. She works on a contract for the U.S. Navy and its Space program. She was born with cerebral palsy, has no speech, and no voluntary movement of her limbs.

"We always knew Ursula had a lot inside," her mother says. "It was just a question of giving her the means to share her gifts with others."

As a youngster in a public school class for multiply disabled children, she communicated by pointing to letters with a paintbrush taped to her forehead. But spelling out words this way was exhausting and slow. Ursula began to flourish educationally only after she was given a computerized device that allowed her to quickly display words in mathematical code. Her parents then discovered the reading ability she had been developing all along.

However, Ursula could communicate only with the few people who knew her code. Later—again, through an OSERS-supported program— she received a "light talker" device which she operates by turning her head. With it, she controls a sound synthesizer that produces an easily understood artificial voice.

During her last year in high school, Ursula participated in an OSERS-funded program that helps students with disabilities go from school to work. She visited various work sites and got on-the-job experience. She got her job with Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc. through this program. The same device that allows Ursula to operate her artificial voice also allows her to operate computers at work.

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Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)

OSERS provides leadership to ensure that people with disabilities have services, resources, and equal opportunities to learn, work and live as fully integrated, contributing members of American society.

Judith E. Heumann
Assistant Secretary, OSERS

The Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) supports programs that serve millions of disabled children, youth and adults and that impact on the lives of America's 49 million citizens with disabilities.

OSERS coordinates the activities of:

The Office of Special Education Programs,

which works to help states provide the quality educational opportunities and early intervention services to help students with disabilities achieve their goals.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration,

which, among other efforts, supports state Vocational Rehabilitation programs that give people with disabilities the education, job-training, and job-placement services they need to gain meaningful employment.

The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research,

which supports research and technological programs that are crafting blueprints for a barrier-free, inclusive society.

United States Department of Education

America needs us all

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